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Welcome to the Seventh Sphere











Chapter 1 by Roggen Wulf

"Welcome."

Isak touched a hand to his temple, his fingertips coming away covered in blood. His vision was dim and blurry, but growing clearer with time. With a groan, he propped himself up on one elbow and tried to shake the fog from his mind.

"Welcome."

The sky above him was bright and blue. The sun shone cheerily, making a few puffy, white clouds nearly glow with light. It was picturesque. Only the dense, spiraling columns of noxious, black smoke interrupted the view. The snaking, swirling towers of fire and soot rose up above the shining buildings like great, dark vines.

"Welcome."

Over the screams and sirens, Isak slowly became aware of the sound of crackling flames. Shaking his head once more and gritting his teeth, he struggled to sit up. A burning car stood blocking an intersection a few meters away. The smoke from the car billowed upward. More smoke came from the building above him and a fire raged in the gaping hole punched in a skyscraper down the block.

"Welcome."

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"Edvin," said Isak, crawling toward one of the bodies nearby. "Edvin?"

Edvin groaned again and sat upright. He stared, his eyes unfocused, then swayed and nearly fell back again. "What....?" was all he could manage to say.

"Edvin, are you hurt?" asked Isak.

Edvin gave Isak a glassy, far away look, then furrowed his brow. "Isak," he said, completely mystified. "Why are you bleeding?"

Isak touched the gash on his temple again and cleared his throat with some difficulty. "I don't know. I think something hit me. Edvin, where are we?"

"Welcome."

For the first time, the upbeat, unisex voice registered in Isak's mind. Sitting down beside Edvin, he turned to look in the direction it had come from. A damaged information kiosk stood not far away, its flickering screen a spiderweb of thick, black cracks. The user interface was completely demolished, and blue-white sparks illuminated the insides of its riddled components.

"Welcome," repeated the hobbled computer. The word ended with a crackle, so there was evidently more to the message. "Welcome."

Using one another for support, Edvin and Isak got to their feet and and slowly limped forward to reach the remains of the kiosk. "Where are we?" asked Isak, hoping enough of the computer had survived that its voice processor might still work.

Being spoken to jarred something within the kiosk's subroutines and, after a moment of making disturbing grinding and clicking noises, it displayed its home screen. Isak made a face and repeated his question. The kiosk pondered this for a moment, then said. "Welcome."

"Welcome to where?" Isak asked, trying to keep his balance while Edvin's head lolled.

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"What's happening?" Isak demanded, his voice shaky from fear and adrenaline.
"Welcome," replied the kiosk.
"What is The Seventh Sphere?" he said, slamming the kiosk with his palm.
"Welcome," said the kiosk. "Welc- Welc- Welc- Wllleeelwwwellccccllcc -" Its screen grew brighter, then with a pop and a cloud of thin, blue-grey smoke, the kiosk abruptly stopped doing anything at all.
"Edvin?" asked Isak. Edvin made a noise, which Isak interpreted as an answer. "We need to find someone who can help us," Isak continued. "We need to find someone who can tell us why we are here. Can you walk?"
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